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# Ceramic Imports to Britain and the Atlantic Seaboard in the Fifth Century and Beyond

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## Summary

In western Britain, particularly the south-west, imported pottery of Mediterranean origin has provided an important means of recognising 5th and 6th-century sites. The ability to link these finds to typologies established in the Mediterranean has led to sherds of imported amphorae or fineware being considered as key chronological markers or indicators of long-distance connections. The arrival of new forms of pottery in the mid-to later 5th century, with a distinct western and coastal distribution, has been used to indicate the emergence of a new and separate post-Roman import system, characterised by a model of direct shipment from the east Mediterranean. This model has been reinforced by a relative absence of known, comparable finds along the Atlantic Seaboard. Recent publications from the Continent, however, are starting to fill this 'gap'. Revised patterns of ceramic distribution in western France and north-west Spain suggest that British sites were integrated into a more complex Atlantic system of trade or exchange. This article will discuss some recent

publications on ceramic imports to Britain, particularly those that offer new interpretations of the date and character of this import system. It will highlight emerging evidence from the Continent, particularly south-western France and, specifically, relevant publications on Late Antique pottery in Bordeaux. This will allow new comparisons to be drawn between patterns of pottery importation and use in Britain, France and the wider Atlantic region in the 5th and 6th centuries.

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## Features

- Key words: pottery; amphora; Atlantic; imported; Phocaean; post-Roman; Byzantine; Devon; Mothecombe; Tintagel; Bantham; Bordeaux; Vigo
- Publication date: 11 March 2016

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# Ceramic Imports to Britain and the Atlantic Seaboard in the Fifth Century and Beyond

Maria Duggan

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# 1. Introduction



Figure 1: Map of selected sites mentioned in text

The recognition that Mediterranean pottery was imported to sites in post-Roman Britain emerged primarily through Radford's excavations at Tintagel (Radford [1956](#)) (see Figure 1). Since then, an increasing number of sites have been identified in western Britain and Ireland and catalogued, principally by Charles Thomas ([1959](#); [1981](#)) and Ewan Campbell ([2007](#)). Despite the relatively small number of vessels involved, these post-Roman Mediterranean imports have been ascribed significance in revealing connections between western Britain and the eastern Mediterranean after AD 410. Tintagel remains by some margin the site with the largest quantity of material, both by sherd and vessel counts, with estimates of 150 amphorae and 80 fineware vessels recovered from the areas investigated to date (Thorpe [2007](#), 246). The recently published report from excavations at Bantham in south Devon has revealed an assemblage with a significant, if smaller, quantity of vessels (Reed *et al.* [2011](#)) (Figure 2). This pottery has additional value in that it allows the identification and dating of 5th- and 6th-century sites in Britain and

Ireland, which may otherwise produce limited datable material. The apparent disappearance of imported pottery in Britain in the early 5th century suggested that supply networks broke down until the arrival of these Mediterranean imports in the mid- to later 5th century (Campbell [2007](#), 138). As such, the systems by which the later imports arrived have typically been seen as distinct from patterns of importation to Roman Britain. In particular, these post-Roman imports have been interpreted as representing direct shipments from the east Mediterranean, therefore implying some sort of direct connection to the Byzantine world between the 5th and 6th centuries.



Figure 2: Bantham Sands, south Devon

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## 2. The Pottery

The imported pottery from the Mediterranean comprises two main categories: amphorae and Red Slip fineware. The amphorae are principally of east Mediterranean and, to a lesser extent North African types. Grouped as 'B wares' in earlier British publications they are now, more usefully, matched to amphora classifications established in the Mediterranean (Riley [1979](#); [1981](#); Campbell [2007](#), 4). Similarly the 'A wares' coined by Radford were matched to Mediterranean classes 'African Red Slip Ware' (ARS) and 'Phocaeen Red Slip Ware' by Thomas' 1981 catalogue (Thomas [1981](#), 3). The latter class has occasionally returned to its earlier designation 'Late Roman C' (LRC) in more recent publications (such as Fernández [2014](#)) following the recognition of parallel production at a variety of centres in the west of modern Turkey (Cau *et al.* [2011](#), 6).

The main types of amphorae identified in British contexts are Late Roman 1 (hereafter [LRA1](#)) and Late Roman 2 ([LRA2](#)), previously classified in Britain as 'Bii' and 'Bi' respectively (Thomas [1959](#)) (Figure 3). The cylindrical amphora [LRA1](#) was produced in the north-east Mediterranean, particularly in Cilicia (southern Turkey) and Cyprus. The globular [LRA2](#) was produced in the Aegean, with production sites identified on Chios and Cnidos and in the Argolid region of Greece (University of Southampton [2005](#); [digital archive](#)). Both types were produced between the 4th and 7th centuries, but they are not thought to have been imported into Roman Britain and their identification on sites in western Britain is taken to

indicate some connection to a separate import system commencing in the 5th century (Campbell [2007](#), 19).



Figure 3: Late Roman amphorae 1-7 (redrawn from Riley [1981](#), 117)

Other East Mediterranean amphorae [LRA3](#) and [LRA4](#) are less common at the post-Roman import sites, but have been identified in late Roman contexts in Britain (Campbell [2007](#), 19-20, 125-6). Amphorae of North African origin were imported into Roman Britain, particularly in the 3rd and 4th centuries (Williams and Carreras [1995](#), 234) but are also thought to be found in post-Roman assemblages – though in a smaller proportion to the east Mediterranean types. These later 'North African' imports have usually been grouped within a broad class 'Bv' in British publications, limiting comparison to continental or Mediterranean examples, but reflecting the difficulties in identifying published types based on fragmentary vessels (Campbell [2007](#), 19). Similarly, recent continental reports commonly subdivide the east Mediterranean amphora types into more closely datable sub-types (see Pieri [2005](#)). Such refinements may prove useful for future comparisons with the British pottery, but given the scarcity of large or diagnostic sherds on many of the British sites, such precision might not always be possible. The forms of amphora are long lasting and cannot usually be closely dated in themselves. Instead, the dates reflect production dates based on typologies established in the Mediterranean, particularly for the Red Slip finewares (Campbell [2007](#), 19).

Beyond amphorae, the presence of imported Mediterranean coarsewares in Britain has been debated following identifications at Tintagel (Batey *et*

*al.* [1993](#), 55-9; Thorpe [2007](#), 233). Campbell suggested that only a very limited quantity of these sherds might represent imported coarsewares - the majority might instead be from amphorae, possibly of types previously unrecognised among the British assemblages (Campbell [2007](#), 24).

A secondary and subsequent phase of imported pottery from the Continent was later identified (Thomas [1959](#)). 'E ware' is a coarse ware, possibly produced in western Gaul, which has a wide distribution in western Britain and Ireland (Campbell [2007](#), 46-7). The main period for its importation is thought to be the later 6th and 7th centuries, and as a result this ware is less relevant to this specific discussion (Campbell [2007](#), 46). Present only in very small numbers in insular contexts, a second ware, 'Dérivées Sigillées Paléochrétiennes' (DSP), is of more relevance as its importation is thought to overlap the main phases of Mediterranean and continental imports (Campbell [2007](#), 133). The 'Atlantic group' of DSP, typically non-oxidised and thought to represent imports to Britain (Campbell [2007](#), 27) is likely to have been produced in Bordeaux (Soulas [1996](#), 237).

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### 3. Interpreting the Imports

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Finds of imported Mediterranean pottery of 5th- and 6th-century date have been seen as directly connected to the formation and maintenance of secular, hierarchical power structures in post-Roman Britain (Harris [2003](#), 147; Campbell and Bowles [2009](#), 301). The imported wares have been identified at a number of British and Irish sites thought to be centres of local political control such as South Cadbury and Cadbury Congresbury in Somerset, Dinas Powys in Glamorgan and Garranes in Co. Cork (Campbell [2007](#), 62,138). Tintagel, despite earlier interpretations as a religious site, is now also interpreted as a centre of high-status, political control (Barrowman *et.al.* [2007](#), 335). Other sites with imported pottery have been interpreted as seasonal 'beachmarket' or trading centres, although Bantham has recently been described as a 'port' (Reed *et al.* [2011](#), 132), while structures excavated at Mothecombe in south Devon provide evidence of 'long-standing settlement' (Agate *et al.* [2012](#), 390) (Figs 4 and 5). Sites further from the main focus of distribution in south-

west Britain, or those with smaller quantities of pottery, may represent secondary redistribution systems within Britain and Ireland (Campbell [2007](#), 138) connected to political or ecclesiastical networks (Harris [2003](#), 147).

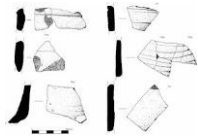


Figure 5: Imported amphora sherds from Mothecombe

Many aspects of the relationship between this pottery and other imported material (including glass) and their significance to post-Roman economic and political systems remain to be fully established, particularly the exchange of commodities that these finds might represent. Demand for minerals, specifically tin, has been typically seen as the driving force of this exchange (Radford [1956](#), 59; Campbell [2007](#), 138), although some have proposed an underlying political or diplomatic function to this exchange system rather than a purely commercial basis (Harris [2003](#), 152). Olive oil and wine have been proposed as the potential contents of the [LRA1](#) and [LRA2](#) amphorae, although wine seems increasingly likely (University of Southampton [2005](#); Pieri [2005](#), 85, 93; Campbell [2007](#), 24). [LRA4](#), specifically, has associations with fine wine from Gaza (Pieri [2007](#), 152), although this type is noted by Campbell as rare within British post-Roman imports (Campbell [2007](#), 22). However, the amphorae and finewares can potentially be considered as proxies for other commodities such as grain. Paul Reynolds has suggested that the presence of ARS without accompanying North African amphorae at sites on the Atlantic Seaboard and in Britain might indicate that these regions were receiving grain shipments (Reynolds [2010](#), 111).

In spite of a long period of data collection and extensive publications on the Mediterranean imported pottery, interpretations have remained relatively static, particularly in relation to the chronology and logistics of its arrival. Radford's 1956 publication laid the foundations for these interpretations, suggesting the mid-5th century or later for the beginning of this exchange. The distribution of these wares is described as 'western and exclusive of Roman Britain' and belonging 'to an age when trade was once more flowing along the Atlantic Seaways' (Radford [1956](#), 67).

Thomas' 1959 article describes pottery 'being brought directly by sea from the Byzantine world through the Straits of Gibraltar' (Thomas [1959](#), 105). The mechanisms for the importation of this pottery are formalised in Michael Fulford's 1989 article; direct shipment from the east Mediterranean is proposed, which is used to demonstrate direct contact between parts of Britain and the Byzantine world in the period c.AD 475-550 (Fulford [1989](#)). He suggests that any Tunisian material might have been collected en route (Fulford [1989](#), 4). Campbell's synthesis presented a refinement of this model into two non-exclusive phases of Aegean imports c.AD 475-525 and African imports c.AD 525-550, again based on direct, though not 'non-stop', shipments (Campbell [2007](#), 26, 138).

The model of direct shipment to Britain has a dual foundation – the relative scarcity of comparable pottery on the Atlantic Seaboard, and observations of the unique composition of the British assemblage. In particular, the higher proportion of east Mediterranean ceramics (amphorae and LRC) to North African products (amphorae and ARS) in British assemblages is seen as distinctively different from the pattern in the west Mediterranean (Fulford [1989](#), 3). This is taken to indicate that

the shipments reaching Britain originated in the Byzantine east and were not redistributed from the west Mediterranean, while the smaller quantities of imported DSP argue against a model of redistribution through Gaul (Fulford [1989](#), 3). The specific and consistent character of the British assemblages is therefore used to argue for Britain being a 'deliberate objective' of east Mediterranean shipments as part of a wider expansion of east Mediterranean trade in the later 5th century; a model reinforced by reference to contemporary texts and epigraphic evidence (Fulford [1989](#), 4-5).

Variations on this argument have been proposed, principally Wooding's 'tramp-steamer' model, which, nevertheless, argued for shipments of east Mediterranean origin taking on additional cargo further west (Wooding [1996](#), 15). Although Wooding incorporated the 'scattered' finds of imports in Atlantic Portugal and Spain into his model, the apparent absence of comparable Mediterranean imports in western France (specifically [LRA2](#) and LRC at urban sites such as Bordeaux) led him to conclude that that shipments did not land between 'Iberia and Cornwall' (Wooding [1996](#); 41-3) For Campbell, however, the 'coherence' of the 'Aegean package' of imports argued against a model of 'tramp-steaming' and instead for a model of direct transport from the two respective Mediterranean sources (Campbell [2007](#), 128).

It must be noted that Fulford raised the possibility of future discoveries on the Atlantic Seaboard, highlighting two isolated sites with late Mediterranean imports, specifically Phocaeen Red Slip Ware/LRC at Conimbriga in Portugal, and a sherd of Late Roman 1 amphora from



Brittany (Fulford [1989](#), 3). Likewise, Campbell's 2007 published database includes isolated finds of Mediterranean pottery at sites in western France, while the accompanying monograph presents a map of the distribution of Phocaean Red Slip Ware (LRC) across the western Mediterranean and Atlantic Seaboard (Campbell [2007](#), 16). In general, however, the limited analysis of comparative data from sites on the Atlantic Seaboard has left the British finds to be largely examined in isolation, which, in turn, has reinforced the apparent exceptional character of the British assemblage. Recent publications from the Continent, particularly on sites in north-west Spain and south-western France, have, however, offered new information on the supply of late Roman pottery to the Atlantic region. These emerging data provide a new opportunity to question these established models, and as a result, to examine patterns of trade or exchange to Britain through the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries.

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## 4. Imported Pottery on the Atlantic Seaboard

Dominique Pieri's study of the Byzantine east Mediterranean wine trade compiled published and unpublished data on imported East Mediterranean amphorae in France of 5th- to 7th-century date, although he noted that his conclusions necessarily focused on sites in the south, given the rarity of examples and generally poorer data in northern regions (Pieri [2005](#), 2). The number of vessels recorded from sites on the western seaboard was relatively small in comparison with the large quantities of imported amphorae recorded in the south-east, especially at Marseille (Pieri [2005](#), 7). Nevertheless, isolated finds of late Roman amphorae at sites in western France were noted, including the fragment of [LRA1](#) from l'Île Lavret, Bréhat, in Brittany (as previously mentioned by Fulford) (Pieri [2005](#), 50). Within the Pays de la Loire a sherd of [LRA1](#) was also identified at Vaas close to the sanctuary at Aubigné-Racan as well as a sherd of [LRA2](#) at Nantes (Pieri [2005](#), 49-53).

Larger quantities of late Roman amphorae have been identified further to the south, in the region surrounding Bordeaux. Amiel and Berthault's study of late imported amphorae in south-west France discussed the types and relative proportions of North African, East Mediterranean and Spanish amphorae found in the region between the 3rd and 6th centuries, drawing specific distinctions between pottery supplied to the main urban centres at Bordeaux and Toulouse (Amiel and Berthault [1996](#)). Small

quantities of late amphorae were documented at a number of villa and rural sites in the south-west, principally African amphorae and [LRA4](#), but the authors noted that beyond the 5th century, imports were, on the whole, only recovered at the larger urban sites (Amiel and Berthault [1996](#), 257). Relatively small amounts of 3rd-century imported amphorae were identified both at Bordeaux and Toulouse, but from the 4th century there seems to have been a considerable increase of Spanish and North African imports, with a higher proportion of Spanish vessels at Toulouse, and North African amphorae at Bordeaux (Amiel and Berthault [1996](#), 256). East Mediterranean amphorae appear at both cities from the 5th century (Amiel and Berthault [1996](#), 256), linked to a general expansion of east Mediterranean wares (Reynolds [2010](#), 105) and paralleling their 5th-century distribution in western Britain.

The 6th-century data from Toulouse were limited, but the authors were able to conclude that the two urban centres were tied into different systems of supply. The continuing importation of considerable quantities of Spanish amphorae to Toulouse in the 5th century was in contrast to their infrequency at Bordeaux, where North African vessels were more common and where, by the 6th century, east Mediterranean imports came to dominate (Amiel and Berthault [1996](#), 256). Observations of proportional differences in the origin of imported amphorae were used to indicate that both cities were ultimately supplied by seaborne commercial routes crossing the Straits of Gibraltar; one route from Lusitania supplying Toulouse via Narbonne, with another, separate channel, conveying North African and eastern products to Bordeaux (Amiel and Berthault [1996](#), 262; Berthault [1999](#), 284). Bordeaux, by this date, would

appear not to have been supplied overland via Toulouse but instead by an Atlantic route, which, Berthault argues, ties the settlement to systems reaching the British Isles (Berthault [1999](#), 153; 2012, 317). These observations refute the model of supply to Britain via overland routes from southern France, as suggested by Bowman ([1996](#), 102).

The ceramic imports to Bordeaux, which seem likely to increase as further excavations are published, demonstrate the significance of this site within exchange systems operating on the Atlantic façade between the 4th and 6th centuries. Reynolds suggests that Bordeaux may, in fact, have been operating as an entrepôt on the Atlantic route supplying post-Roman Britain (Reynolds [2010](#), 109). Nevertheless, the specific forms of pottery imported to Bordeaux must be considered against the British material before a closer connection can be established. Pieri's catalogue notes three sites in Bordeaux with late Roman Mediterranean imports. The excavations at Saint-Christoly have not been fully published but produced North African amphorae and [LRA4](#) from 5th-century deposits (Berthault [2012](#), 311; Pieri [2005](#), 50). The excavations of the necropolis beneath the basilica at Saint-Seurin again produced North African amphorae and [LRA4](#), here reused for infant inhumations (Pieri [2005](#), 50; Watier [1973](#)). The recent full publication of the excavations at Place Camille-Jullian, Bordeaux, presented additional data of relevance to the British imports and contrasting evidence for potential connections between the city and sites in western Britain (Maurin [2012](#)). The particular importance of this excavation is that it revealed a continuous stratigraphic sequence between the 1st and 15th centuries and has the potential to provide information on the very latest Mediterranean imports to Bordeaux (Amiel

and Berthault [1996](#), 255). In addition, the site produced the first Byzantine coins identified from Bordeaux of 6th- and 7th-century date (Bost [2012](#), 397-8).

Place Camille-Jullian produced significant quantities of late Roman imported pottery, specifically ARS and LRC (Bonifay [2012](#)) and amphorae of Spanish, North African and east Mediterranean origin (Berthault [2012](#)). The amphora assemblage demonstrates parallels with the post-Roman imports in Britain, comprising largely of North African and East Mediterranean amphorae, although there is a higher proportion of the former in the 5th century and the latter in the 6th (Berthault [2012](#)). The 5th-century examples were also reported to include four amphorae of Lusitanian origin; one [Almagro 51C](#) and three [Almagro 51B](#) amphorae (Berthault [2012](#), 315). Iberian amphorae have not generally been seen as part of the 'package' reaching post-Roman Britain, although amphorae of southern Spanish and possibly Portuguese origin may have been identified at Tintagel (Reynolds [2010](#), 108, 292-3).

Again, Berthault proposes that the East Mediterranean amphorae arrived at Bordeaux via the same Atlantic channels supplying Britain, and, citing Fulford's model, interprets these as representing direct shipments from the Byzantine world via Atlantic channels (Berthault [2012](#), 317). However, some differences with the established pattern of post-Roman imported amphorae in Britain must be noted. The excavations produced six vessels of [LRA1](#), two [LRA2](#) and one [LRA3](#), but also a total of twelve [LRA4](#) (Berthault [2012](#), 314-16). The latter type, as mentioned, has only been identified in small numbers as a post-Roman import in Britain (Campbell

[2007](#), 22). In contrast, Place Camille-Jullian was the first site in Bordeaux to reveal East Mediterranean amphorae of types other than [LRA4](#) (Berthault [2012](#), 317). Pieri notes that away from south-east France only [LRA1](#) and [LRA4](#) are well diffused, and suggests links between [LRA4](#) and the supply of highly prized wine to religious sites – including to Lyon, Tours and Bordeaux (Pieri [2007](#), 152). Notably, for comparisons with Britain, [LRA2](#) is less common.

Additionally, four Palestinian [LRA5](#)/'Bag shaped' wine amphorae of probable 5th- or 6th-century date were identified at Place Camille-Jullian (Berthault [2012](#), 316); a type that has not been recognised among the British imports (Campbell [2007](#), 19). Finally, whereas the ceramic data from Saint-Christoly and Saint-Seurin would suggest exchange with the Mediterranean ceased by the start of the 6th century, the latest East Mediterranean and North African amphorae from Place Camille-Jullian indicated importation into the early 7th century (Berthault [2012](#), 317), well beyond the mid-6th century date generally given for the end of Mediterranean pottery imports to Britain. If Bordeaux was indeed supplied as part of the same exchange systems, this might indicate a foreshortening of the northern extent of the Atlantic routes by the later 6th century.

Michel Bonifay's report on the fineware from Place Camille-Jullian also discusses possible links with supply to Britain, but he suggests that the forms do not necessarily reveal a straightforward parallel. The identified LRC from Place Camille-Jullian (five sherds from two vessels) is of the same form LRC3 that characterises its British distribution (Bonifay [2012](#),

257-8). A sherd of LRC of Hayes Form 3C was also previously recorded from the excavations at Saint-Christoly, Bordeaux (Hayes [1972](#); Mayet and Picon [1986](#), 130). Reynolds notes that the majority of LRC found in Britain fits into the period AD 460–550, but mentions the presence of a few early 7th-century LRC Form 10 vessels at Tintagel (Reynolds [2010](#), 108), as originally identified by Thomas (Thomas [1981](#), 6). Campbell has, however, identified these same sherds as LRC Form 3E, reaffirming the 'tight' chronology (c.AD 475-525) he proposed for the importation of this ware (Campbell [2007](#), 14). The ARS from Place Camille-Jullian (a minimum of 14 vessels) also shows some similarities to the vessels recovered in post-Roman contexts in western Britain, principally Hayes Forms 91C, 99A, 103 and 104 (Bonifay [2012](#), 256). Bonifay, however, identified other, later forms that have not been observed within British assemblages, specifically Hayes 90, 105 and 109A, which again indicate importation to Bordeaux into the first half of the 7th century (Bonifay [2012](#), 256).

The Place Camille-Jullian excavations may have additional relevance for dating finds of 'DSP' in Britain and Ireland; it produced 4680 sherds of this ware, although a high proportion was thought to be residual in later contexts (Soulas [2012](#), 247). Campbell suggested a largely 6th-century date for the Insular examples (29 vessels), as the forms encountered seemed to belong later in the DSP repertoire (Campbell [2007](#), 27-8). Soulas' table of DSP frequency from Place Camille-Jullian records the presence of Rigoir Form 29 mortaria (as found at Tintagel and Dinas Powys) from the later 5th century and throughout the 6th, and Form 16 (also found at Dinas Powys) intermittently from the early 5th, though

more frequently from the mid-5th century onward (Soulas [2012](#), 247). Considerations of the stratigraphic relationship between DSP forms and the imported Mediterranean wares emerging from excavations at Bordeaux might have further implications for the chronology of Mediterranean and continental imports to Britain.

Research currently being carried out in France by Joachim Le Bomin has further potential to increase the available information on imported pottery in Atlantic regions. Beyond this growing French data, increasing amounts of imported Mediterranean pottery have also been identified from sites along the north and west coast of Spain and Portugal. As mentioned, the imported late Roman pottery at Conimbriga has been referred to in research on the British finds (Fulford [1989](#), 3; Campbell [2007](#), 16).

Significant quantities of late imported fineware have been identified at the Suevic capital Braga/*Bracara Augusta*, principally ARS, but also LRC – of which Hayes Form 3 dominates – and two sherds of LRD/Cypriot Red Slip Ware, a ware not yet identified in Britain or Ireland (Quaresma and Morais [2012](#), 375). Conversely, the site produced a larger proportion of East Mediterranean to North African amphorae – echoing the British pattern – despite the absence of [LRA2](#) (Quaresma and Morais [2012](#), 380).

Mediterranean imports, including LRC form 3 have been identified from various excavations at A Coruña, also in Galicia (López Pérez [2004](#)). The fish-salting complex at Tróia in Portugal has likewise produced imported pottery, mostly dating up to the early to mid-5th century, but with some later fineware forms, including ARS Hayes Forms 91B and 91C and one LRC Hayes form 3, associated with a necropolis at the site following its 5th-century abandonment (Magalhães [2012](#) 365-70). One [LRA1](#) was



identified at a villa site at Gijón in northern Spain (Fernández Ochoa *et al.* [2006](#), 143) extending the distribution of these imports.

Of crucial importance to these Atlantic systems, however, is the pottery recovered from recent excavations at the city of Vigo in north-west Spain (Fernández [2010](#); [2014](#)), where the largest quantity of 5th to 7th-century Mediterranean imports has been identified on the Atlantic. The quantity of LRC alone identified at Vigo exceeds the entire British and Irish assemblage of all contemporary Mediterranean imported pottery (Campbell [2007](#), xiv; Fernández [2014](#), 222). As with the British material, the amphorae are principally of east Mediterranean origin, but following the pattern at Bantham rather than Tintagel, [LRA1](#) dominates the assemblage (Fernández [2010](#), 234-5). Bonifay notes that only the sites of Vigo and Place Camille-Jullian, Bordeaux have the latest imports on the Atlantic Seaboard (dating into to the 7th century) (Bonifay [2012](#), 256). Both locations have examples of late ARS forms that have not been identified in Britain or Ireland. However, Bonifay identifies certain differences in the composition of the two assemblages, specifically the relative proportion of finewares (mostly ARS at Place Camille-Jullian but LRC in contemporary contexts at Vigo), as well as the scarcity of [LRA4](#) at Vigo in comparison with Bordeaux (Bonifay [2012](#), 256). The incorporation of Vigo into a more complex system of Atlantic transport – as revealed by the work of Adolfo Fernández Fernández – is acknowledged to make sense over the earlier, simple model of direct connection between the east Mediterranean and Britain, but Bonifay indicates that these specific distinctions leave room for the possibility that some goods also arrived at Bordeaux via inland channels (Bonifay [2012](#), 256). Nevertheless, the

presence of Atlantic DSP at Vigo clearly indicates some sort of direct connection between Vigo and Bordeaux (Reynolds [2010](#), 105; Bonifay [2012](#), 256).

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## 5. Recent British Finds

New identifications of Mediterranean imports continue to be made in Britain, permitting understanding the nature of this exchange to be revised. The recent publication of excavations at Bantham produced not only significant quantities of pottery (52 imported amphorae of diverse types and at least two LRC vessels of Hayes Form 3 (Bidwell *et al.* [2011](#)), but an assemblage revealing some similarities to the emerging pattern seen on Atlantic sites. The amphorae include two examples of [LRA4](#), as well as at least two amphorae of North African origin (Bidwell *et al.* [2011](#), 94). Perhaps more significantly, the assemblage is dominated by [LRA1](#), with only a single body sherd of [LRA2](#). The authors note that this might indicate a generally early date for the assemblage (Bidwell *et al.*, [2011](#), 94; 112), while for Reynolds it indicates [LRA2](#) and LRC did not necessarily travel together (Reynolds [2010](#), 110). The high proportion of [LRA2](#) has been seen to mark the British assemblage as very distinct in character from that of the west Mediterranean, where [LRA1](#) is typically the most common eastern type (Reynolds [2010](#), 106). The quantity of [LRA2](#) in Britain and Ireland is certainly, relatively high, but [LRA1](#) would appear to be the most common. Like Bantham, the site at Mothecombe produced a higher proportion of [LRA1](#) (five vessels) to [LRA2](#) (two vessels) (Duggan [2012](#)). This emerging pattern might represent regional differences in supply or variations in the chronology of importation but might also

suggest the British assemblage to be less 'unique' than previously considered, and instead, more closely aligned to Atlantic assemblages.

The 2011 Bantham report also proposed an earlier date than AD 475 for the first Mediterranean imports, possibly AD 450, and as a result raised the possibility of continuous, uninterrupted importation of commodities via Atlantic sea-routes from the later 4th century and throughout the 5th century (Reed *et al.* [2011](#) , 113). The authors note that North African and possibly 'Palestinian' imported amphorae have been identified in late Roman contexts at Exeter and therefore suggest that the Atlantic sea-routes were still open in the very late Roman period (Bidwell *et al.* [2011](#), 113-14). The presence of céramique à l'éponge at Exeter is also seen to reveal late Roman contacts with western France (Bidwell *et al.* [2011](#), 114). They propose a model whereby the sites negotiating the exchange of minerals shifted between the late 4th and late 5th century, but although the sites receiving imported Mediterranean pottery changed, the routes of supply did not (Bidwell *et al.* [2011](#), 115). The narrow date range of c.AD 475-550 for the importation of Mediterranean pottery has also been questioned at Tintagel, where imports may again have arrived by the mid-5th century, and may, potentially, have continued beyond AD 550 (Barrowman *et al.* [2007](#), 332).

Another example from Britain with potential implications for the chronology, and indeed distribution, of Mediterranean imports is the recently reported identification of ARS at Pevensey Castle in East Sussex (Fulford and Rippon [2011](#)). Although African Red Slip ware is an occasional find in Roman contexts up to the 4th century (Bird [1977](#); Tyers

[1996](#), 152), its 5th/6th-century distribution has been seen as completely separate and associated with the new system supplying imported goods to western parts of Britain. This discovery, therefore, represents the site furthest east with late forms of this pottery, well beyond its established, post-Roman distribution. A body sherd of a possible East Mediterranean amphora may be associated with these finds (Fulford and Rippon [2011](#), 125).

One sherd of ARS was tentatively identified as the flange from a bowl of Hayes Form 91; variant C of this form has previously been recognised among western British imports at Tintagel and Dinas Powys (Thomas [1981](#), 8; Campbell [2007](#), 17), as well as at Bordeaux (Bonifay [2012](#), 253). Timby suggests an early to mid-5th century date for the Pevensey sherd, in line with earlier variants, 91A and B (Timby [2011](#), 145), whereas in western British contexts 91C is usually seen as a 6th-century find. A second sherd was matched to Hayes Form 99, which again has been identified previously, although variant 99C, as identified here, is potentially very late – indeed later than any other British or Irish examples of ARS. Thomas catalogued variants 99A and 99B of this form, including examples from Tintagel (Thomas [1981](#), 8-9). Within the Pevensey report a late 6th to 7th-century date is given for 99C (Timby [2011](#); Bonifay [2004](#), 179), although LRFW1 suggested production up to the later 7th century (Cau *et al.* 2011, 5). Unfortunately these two sherds are not illustrated, preventing comparison with other British finds. Two sherds were from the same vessel, the rim of which was illustrated in the report. It is described as being closest to Hayes Form 75, which has not previously been identified at any British site (Timby [2011](#), 145). The early

to mid-5th century date given for this sherd is noted to be 'late amongst the British finds' (Timby [2011](#), 145).

Referring to Bird's study of African Red Slip in Roman Britain (Bird [1977](#), 272), Timby suggests that these vessels are unlikely to represent 'traded cargoes' directed to the site, but instead might represent personal belongings (Timby [2011](#), 145). A similar discovery in western Britain would, doubtlessly, be automatically tied to post-Roman, long-distance import systems. The discussion chapter within the report, however, does describe these finds as altering the view that post-Roman Mediterranean imports are only to be found in western Britain (Fulford and Rippon [2011](#), 125). The authors also suggest a possible association with the previous discovery of DSP at the site (Lyne [2009](#), 101; Fulford and Rippon [2011](#), 125). It may be that the ARS from Pevensey raises the possibility of future identifications of Mediterranean pottery in post-Roman Britain beyond the traditional, western distribution. These sherds, however, demonstrate both the difficulties and importance in identifying known and datable forms based on incomplete or fragmentary vessels. As the chronology for the 5th- and 6th-century importation of Mediterranean pottery to Britain is largely founded on matching abraded fragments of fineware to published typologies, such attributions can have far-reaching implications.

The distribution pattern of the imported pottery has also been extended by the discovery at Rhynie in eastern Scotland of a small group of amphora sherds of types [LRA1](#) and [LRA2](#) (Noble *et al.* [2013](#), 1142).

Excavations at this Pictish site also produced fragments of glass vessels imported from western France (Noble *et al.* [2013](#), 1142).

Overall, these recent publications allow the imported material in Britain to be better aligned with patterns in the west Mediterranean, and reveal that imported pottery in post-Roman Britain is both more varied and more widely distributed than traditionally assumed. It is clear that the later 5th and 6th century witnessed the unprecedented supply of east Mediterranean imports – including new types of amphorae and fineware – to a new group of sites in western Britain and Ireland. There remains, however, a level of uncertainty regarding the first half of the 5th century, and the potential continuation of late Roman patterns. As mentioned, [LRA1](#) and [LRA2](#) are not thought to be imported to Roman Britain, unlike North African amphorae and the East Mediterranean [LRA3](#) and [LRA4](#). Campbell describes the increasing identification of North African and Palestinian amphorae at late Roman urban contexts, including examples from London, Gloucester and Exeter (Campbell [2007](#), 19-22, 125-6). However, as these could not be confirmed as post-Roman imports he did not include them in his distribution. Typically, the North African amphorae found at these urban sites are of 3rd to late 4th/early 5th century types, and cannot be easily equated with the later African amphora imports identified in the Atlantic and west Mediterranean. The continuing use of the 'Bv' category has somewhat complicated this distinction.

Similarly, Bird's review did not record any forms of ARS that were necessarily 5th-century imports. The latest identified form, a base of ARS 67 from Southwark, was noted to be from a late 4th-century context (Bird

[1977](#), 275). More recently, sherds of ARS were identified at Shadwell in London, but the identified form – Hayes 50/50A – is of 3rd/4th century date (Douglas *et al.* [2011](#), 177-9). This site also produced a number of North African amphorae of 3rd/4th century date as well as a *spatheion* type 1; the latter was found in a probable 5th-century context and might feasibly have arrived in the first half of the 5th century (Douglas *et al.* [2011](#), 68, 172; Williams [2011](#), 80). Three small bodysherds of [LRA3](#) were also found at Shadwell, but it was not clear if these belonged to the earlier one-handled type or the two-handled type that characterises the post-Roman imports (Williams [2011](#), 81). Elsewhere, the presence of 'Palestinian' amphorae has suggested a general background of East Mediterranean amphora importation to Britain in the first few decades of the 5th century. An amphora recovered at Billingsgate in London, for example, has been considered to date to the first-half of the 5th century (Marsden [1980](#), 80-1; Campbell [2007](#), 125).

In the light of new Atlantic data, such as the amphora group from Bordeaux, as well as the recent evidence from Bantham and Pevensey, future considerations of the Mediterranean amphorae and fineware interpreted as late Roman imports to Britain have the potential to increase both the chronological range of the post-Roman imports and the extent of their distribution. Certain factors suggest, however, that the western British 'post-Roman' imports represent a separate dynamic – and that there was some break in supply via the Atlantic channels. Firstly, the shift in the focus of Mediterranean imports from urban sites to fortified, hill-top centres and coastal 'beachmarket' sites. Secondly, the lack of locations in Britain with Mediterranean imports of both late 4th/early 5th



century date and later 5th/6th century types ([LRA1](#), [LRA2](#); LRC; late forms of ARS) (Campbell [2007](#), 126). An unprovenanced [LRA1](#) was noted by Roberta Tomber from the Museum of London collections, but this was discounted as a 'genuine London find' (Tomber [2003](#), 107). The ARS from Pevensey also presents a possible exception, although it is feasible that these vessels arrived via an alternative, Rhineland, route (Fulford and Rippon [2011](#), 125). Finally, the evidence emerging from the Atlantic suggests some continuity in exchange, but an overall reduction in importation from the Mediterranean in the middle decades of the 5th century (Fernández [2014](#), 128, 415-30). It is likely that this pattern will have been reflected, and potentially exaggerated, at the northern reaches of this system.

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## 6. Discussion

This review has not offered an exhaustive list of Atlantic sites with 5th, 6th or 7th century Atlantic imported pottery, but has demonstrated the potential value of comparisons between Britain and sites across the Atlantic region. Further analysis of patterns of Mediterranean imports between Bordeaux, Vigo and other Atlantic sites, and how this compares to Britain, is clearly needed. Nevertheless, this increasing evidence clearly indicates that Britain was not an isolated destination for exchange within the Atlantic, but part of a widespread and persistent Atlantic network. Our understanding of ceramic imports to Britain in the 5th and 6th centuries must now involve a consideration of patterns of supply along Atlantic channels in the same period.

This new understanding allows the established interpretations arising from the British imports to be questioned, particularly the idea of direct connection between the Mediterranean and post-Roman Britain. As discussed, this model is based on the relative scarcity of comparable material on the Atlantic Seaboard, and on the apparent distinctive nature of the British material. The increasing amounts of Mediterranean imports identified on the Atlantic Seaboard certainly refute the first argument. The second factor, the specific composition of the British import assemblage, requires further consideration. Campbell summarised five specific features of the 'Atlantic' group of Mediterranean imports that distinguish it from the pattern in the west Mediterranean and which necessitate an

alternative interpretation of supply. These comprise: a lack of Gazan or Palestinian amphorae, a disproportionately high amount of [LRA2](#), a low proportion of ARS to LRC, an absence of LRD and, finally, the restricted date-range of the imports (Campbell [2007](#), 127). Each of these factors can be questioned, to some degree, by the recent research and publications that have been discussed, although a number of these observations would appear to remain valid. The new evidence from the Atlantic Seaboard reveals sites that certainly show similarities to the pattern observed in post-Roman Britain but also indicates a greater degree of complexity within the Atlantic region as a whole. The complexities of the relationship between post-Roman Britain, these wider Atlantic systems and between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean can only be understood by further research and analysis on patterns of ceramic distribution between these regions.

Nevertheless, as there is significant evidence of 5th to 7th century imports on the Atlantic Seaboard, and there are sites that share characteristics with the British assemblage, it seems possible that some of the Mediterranean imports on sites in Britain or Ireland may have been redistributed from sites in France or Spain. This might easily be the case for some of the British or Irish sites with only a few sherds and which were already thought to have been supplied by systems of redistribution from south-west Britain. The ultimate origin of the imports cannot be denied, but the argument for simple, direct contact between Britain and the Byzantine world in the 5th century, based solely on the pottery, seems less convincing.

It remains to be clarified, additionally, whether trade with Britain was the driving force of this system. Reynolds questioned whether Atlantic sites such as Braga, Vigo, Conimbriga and Tróia were able to 'make a market in their own right' or simply took advantage of passing shipments to Britain (Reynolds [2010](#), 108). The continuation of imports to Vigo and Bordeaux beyond the mid-6th century nevertheless suggests that, unless the conventional end-date for the British imports is too early, connections between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic continued after exchange between Britain and the Mediterranean had ceased. Even if trade with Britain was the impetus for the Atlantic system in the 5th century, this may not have remained the case. These questions need to be fully addressed, but regardless, the emerging data from Atlantic sites clearly indicate that 5th and 6th century Britain was part of a more complex system of exchange than previously recognised.

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